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FIGHTING FRITZ

A true narrative of the experiences
gained in five months of furious
fighting on the Somme and at Ypres



By

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of the 58th Canadian Infantry

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Fighting Fritz

By Sergt. Ronald Kingsley

(Ronald Kingsley, a Detroiter, was one of the first to enlist in the Canadian Expeditionary forces. He went early in 1915. Kingsley joined the Seventieth Canadians, but after getting to England he was transferred to the Fifty-eighth Battalion. He was wounded near Bapaume and was in British and Canadian hospitals for nine months. He was prominent in Detroit during the last Liberty Loan campaign and he also assisted in the Y. M. C. A. drives in Michigan and surrounding states.)



SUPPOSE out of the millions of fighting men on the different fronts there aren't more than a few odd hundreds who are not fatalists.

By "fighting men" I mean the ones who have been actually under fire.

When a fellow gets out there in No Man's Land, or in the trenches, and he sees companions dropping beside him while he carries on unscathed, he cannot help but feel that, somehow or other, the bullet on which his name and number are written has not yet been fired.

It's just like the old saw—"if you're born to be hanged you're not going to die in bed."

Before I went over I believed, just as almost everyone else in this country believed, that life was something precious—something to be guarded. I have sort of changed my mind. If you are going to get yours you'll get it, no matter where you are. And unless you can make up your mind to that, it's a cinch you won't be any good as a soldier.

I have been out there fighting with bullets whining all around me, fellows I had just spoken to dropping beside me, shells hurtling overhead, trench mortars banging away, bombs flying this way and that and yet there were always some of us who came back without a scratch. I finally got mine after five months in the front line, at Ypres and on the Somme, and after I got it I was saved from death because one ambulance was too crowded and I had to get into another. The ambulance that went first was struck by a shell and blown up; the one I was in escaped.

I have had sniper's bullets fired at me and get the man standing beside me. Canadians right next have been bayoneted and I have rammed the steel home.

If a fellow can go through five months of this without getting the same religious views I have I'd like to see him. I have compared notes with hundreds of soldiers and they all feel the same.

Faith in His Hunch

When I went over two years ago I thought it a lark. I knew there would be desperate fighting and I knew that I would be lucky if I came out with a whole skin, but somehow I couldn't stay away. I figured it the greatest thing in the

history of the world and I wanted to do my share. But all the time I had a hunch that I would get back to America and Detroit. I used to tell the fellows of this hunch when we came out of the trenches and into the billets. The man who has never been under fire cannot expect to know the sense of relief that pervades a soldier when he comes out of the trenches after a heavy bombardment. He wants everyone to know he is alive. He shakes hands with himself, with his companions, with his officers.

They used to say to me:

"Well, Kingsley, I see your hunch still holds good."

"Yes, and I know it will," I used to answer.

The day I was potted I thought of that hunch, and while I knew I was badly hit I could not rid myself of the thought that I was going to get back safe.

As I staggered across No Man's Land after being in a German trench I kept muttering:

"Keep going, Kingsley, you've got to make good on that hunch you've been bragging about."

That is one of the highspots of the whole thing.

After enlisting I went through the usual training schedule that has become so well known.

We were in Canada for a time, then went across to England and from there to France. I saw my first trench duty on June 16, 1916, in the Ypres salient. That first day cured me of war—and if Americans could see the devastation in France and Belgium they would insist that this thing be carried on until the Hun is crushed. I have seen little children, dozens of them, with their hands cut off at the wrist. I have seen mothers and young girls who were defiled. I have seen wrecked towns, ruined churches. I have seen Red Cross men who were killed while doing their duty of succoring the wounded. One Red Cross man, a chap named Hargreaves, was shot through the hip by a wounded German while he knelt over another dying Fritz. I have been under fire when wounded. I have seen helpless men hacked down. I have seen—but I can't go further, the horror of it all fills me so I cannot write.

No Mercy to Canadians

Before we went into the trenches we were told that there was a particularly bitter feeling between Canadians and Germans. I remember our commanding officer lining us up and telling us that we need not expect mercy if captured.

"The Canadians are more than a match for the Huns and they know it," he told us. "And knowing it they do not make prisoners of us. We have beaten them so many times that death is the warrant signed for us if taken."

I thought the officer was telling us that to make us fight harder. But later I realized the truth of the statement.

It will be the same with the Americans.

Americans and Canadians are a good deal alike. I do not expect that Uncle Sam's soldiers will carry on any better than the Canadians, but they should do as well, for they live similar lives. They are in the open more than the British or French or Italians. They are better marksmen—that is, the general run of them.

The trenches we went into were in terrible shape. They were half filled with water. In places the parapets had been knocked off and there were rats running around. That first night will never be forgotten. I strained my faculties all through the darkened hours, never once relaxing, and when morning came I was probably the happiest being on earth. We were in the supporting lines five days and at no time did Fritz display any desire to shell us out. I was mighty thankful for that.

I have listened to old timers telling of the wars they were in and saying they were never frightened.

I know now just how big liars they were.

There isn't anyone who goes into the trenches but who is scared to death the first time he hears a big shell, or the first time someone is popped off beside him. But the feeling gradually dissolves into a fatalistic spirit—the spirit I spoke of in the beginning.

After being in the supporting trench for five days we were taken out and were in the reserve trenches for four days. Then we went into the front line and were there for eight days, following which came a rest of four days. It was while we were resting that I got the first touch of German gas. We were back so far, however, that I did not get any ill effects. But we did have to don our helmets. After I got out of the helmet I figured I would just as soon brave the gas. But you get accustomed to the gas masks and welcome their protection after a time.

Blown Up by a Mine

One night the Germans blew up a mine to the left of Hill 60 and our fellows immediately started a bombardment, figuring the Huns were coming over. But they didn't. I guess they were nervous and figured we would be waiting for them. The blowing up of that mine really gave me my soldier's clothes. I was hurled from my feet and when I got up I felt myself all over to see if there were any sore spots. I couldn't find any so I figured that thereafter I would take things as they came and not think of possibilities.

Then, two nights afterwards, the officer called for volunteers to go out with a working party in No Man's Land.

I went.

Of course this is dangerous work, but there are always more volunteers than can be used. We go out, clean up the land in case there happen to be any Germans creeping over to listen to the conversation of our fellows, fill our sand bags and test their barbed wire defenses. Then, too, there are "jumping-off trenches" to be dug. I will describe these later. This night Fritz was nervous. He evidently was anticipating a raid, and he started throwing up a lot of rifle grenades. These are shot from a rifle with a blank cartridge. One of them landed almost in our midst. There were 40 of us who went out; not so many came back.

When this grenade landed it killed one soldier, who was bent over filling up a sand bag, and wounded his brother, who was holding the sack, in 14 places.

The following night there was a heavy bombardment. I was on trench patrol duty and I took it upon myself to go around to the different sentries and cheer them up. I knew some funny stories and I recited most of them. A lot of them were old, but they went well. For that night's work I was made a lance corporal.

Night Raid

This is probably the most exciting of all war sports! The smaller the raid the greater the excitement, particularly for those actively concerned in it. Wet nights are best because there is usually less shell fire and always the possibility that the sentries are not quite so keen.

Before we go we should know something of the enemy barbed wire—where the channels are located, and the relative point in our trench to the channel in Fritz's wire, if possible.

Sometimes, in fact most times, we take just a revolver and a couple of bombs, that is, when the party is a small one, about six in number, for instance. Large parties take rifle and bayonet always.

We are naturally familiar with the channels in our own barbed wire, so that there is no trouble in getting out to No Man's Land. Our patrols are aware of our trip and we do not expect to meet a Fritz patrol, though at times the unexpected does happen, in which case the raid would likely be called off. It would be dangerous to get into a Fritz trench and have the Fritz patrol return while we were there.

Our faces are blackened when going out on these raids for two reasons. The first is that star shells going up would cause a reflection of our white faces; the second, that if we saw a white face we would know it was an enemy. Under normal conditions we get into No Man's Land and creep and crawl across, being careful to make absolutely no show of movement when the star shells go up, because a movement detected by Fritz is the signal for machine gun fire. The whole party would suffer in consequence. The least sound would have the same effect—to cough or to sneeze would be fatal, so that a man suffering from a cold is never included in the party.

Then to find the channel in the enemy barbed wire. Not far from this channel is usually a dugout, and on either side of the dugout a sentry or machine gun emplacement is also usually found. If the night is wet, more than likely only one man is at each post, the others taking to the dugout for comfort and safety. Once inside the barbed wire—which, by the way, we are careful not to touch, because it is often charged with electricity—two go to the left and two to the right, the other two remaining opposite the dugout.

How It Is Done

Signals are previously arranged. One of the methods frequently used is to have two long pieces of cord, one piece connecting the men on the left to the center, the other piece connecting the men on the right to the center. The signal, for instance, is from the men on the right or left: One pull, "Have located my man." Two pulls, from the center to the men on either side: "Are you ready?" A reply of three pulls from the men on either side: "Yes." Four pulls from the center: "Go for your man." The center men at the same moment go to the dugout.

The sentries on either side are silenced by the quickest method possible, usually by throttling them. One man on either side of the dugout remains on guard after his part has been accomplished there. The spare man goes to the assistance of the men going into the dugout.

The center men go down the dugout, one man leading, revolver in either hand, the rest with their bombs ready. The leading man backs the Germans into the corner farthest from their rifles, making sure that their hands are above their heads, so as to give no opportunity for treachery. The other men then take water, if they need it, and probably a few canned goods, look for maps, and usually take at least one prisoner for the purpose of obtaining information. These are taken back to a previously found shell hole not very far from Fritz's barbed wire and marked with a piece of white tape or something white, which is conspicuous in the dark and mud. One man is left to guard these, the others going back to the dugout in case assistance is necessary.

Getting Back

If all is well, the party will then retreat from the trench. The men back out of the dugout, going up step by step, slowly, keeping the Germans covered all of the time. The man stationed on either side gets out of the trench, then the center men get out and lie down flat over the dugout entrance until the other men have safely reached the shell hole. Then two or three bombs are thrown into the dugout and the men who have thrown these bombs then beat it for their lives to the shell hole.

The noise of the explosion arouses Fritz for quite a distance along the line. Naturally he turns on his machine guns and all of his rifles across No Man's Land, so it is very essential to keep low in the shell hole. The machine gun and rifle fire may last a couple of hours, because Fritz is really badly scared. The men that are in the shell hole are having a good time, safe from bullets, quenching their thirst with the water unwillingly donated by the Germans, and feasting on the canned goods likewise obtained.

When the machine gun and rifle fire lets up they creep and crawl back with their prisoner and the remainder of their loot to their own trenches, and report to the officer, who usually tells them that it has been a satisfactory night's work.

The raid itself only takes a very few minutes, but a great deal of time is consumed in getting across and back, the total being usually from four to five hours, although the strain and tension make it seem a lifetime.

Two Mines Meet

There were plenty of exciting moments in that district even though we were not under heavy fire all the time.

Right along with us were several companies of engineers, and they were continually mining under the German positions.

One night they all got a terrible scare.

For several days they had been mining towards a German position, when, of a sudden, they heard German voices and an instant later a part of the wall fell in. Our fellows had been driving right along and slam-banged into some Huns coming from the other side. The Huns ran back. So did the Canadians. That is, all excepting three.

You know the miners haven't any weapons, excepting their digging tools, and they don't take any chances on open clashes with the enemy.

Well, these three young chaps who stayed behind hid back in a narrow passage, the entrance to which had been almost completely hidden by the fallen earth.

Pretty soon a German officer came along, accompanied by several soldiers with their bayonets fixed.

He looked over what our engineers had done and he swore heavy Teutonic oaths for several minutes. He waved his revolver and vowed what he would do if he ever caught "the English pigs," for he didn't figure the Canadians were at that point. We retired from that section of our trench for the remainder of the night, as we expected something to happen from the mines. It didn't come. The Germans probably retired from theirs, under a similar supposition.

For a time I was a member of a party whose duty it was to follow up the mining operations of the enemy and extract the explosives about as fast as they put them in place.

We had located where they were mining and worked in behind them, taking out the dynamite, or nitroglycerin, or whatever explosive they happened to stick in.

I have often wondered at the thoughts of Fritz when he turned on the switch and nothing happened.

There were lots of times when we laughed at the joke we were playing, even while we were taking out the dope. We didn't do it because we weren't nervous, either. But the laugh sort of relieved the tension.

It was a good one on the Hun, too.

It was on this section of the western front that I had an experience which befalls few soldiers. I captured a spy.

Bagging a Spy

We were on a working party digging a trench one night, and I noticed an officer sneaking through the shell holes and coming towards us. The fact that he was out there all alone made me curious.

I watched him and pretty soon he dropped over the edge of our ditch.

I challenged him. He tried to brush me aside, snapping:

"I'm an officer."

"So I see," I returned, "but what battalion do you belong to?"

"The Sixtieth," he answered promptly.

I immediately ordered him under arrest and he protested vigorously, declaring he would have my corporal's stripes torn from me.

He nearly bluffed me out, but I determined to go through with it. I knew that the Sixtieth battalion was back in the rest billets. It had been practically wiped out several days before and had been retired for reinforcements.

We marched the officer to headquarters and there it was proved that he was a spy. He was a German officer who had crept out into No Man's Land, taken the uniform from a dead Sixtieth officer and then had tried to brazen his way through. He would have got by me, the chances are, had he mentioned any other battalion of the line, for there were a lot of new officers coming in each day and I could not keep track of all of them. But when he said the Sixtieth my suspicions were aroused still further and I couldn't take any chances.

Of course he was shot.

Rats Drive Out Armies

The trench we were guarding was back of a crater near Hill 60.

But before I go on with my story I've got to tell about this crater. It was made by heavy explosives and was probably 70 yards across. The Germans held to one lip and we held to another. We could not dislodge them. They could not dislodge us. This crater linked up with Hill 60 and our trenches.

There were some of our men holding in a thin line at the base of Hill 60, and after nightfall it fell to some of us to take them over provisions and ammunition for the following day. They were in such a perilous position that they could not venture out in the light of the sun and the hill was such a strategic point that we could not relinquish any hold, however slight, upon it.

Down in this immense crater there were hundreds of rats and they used to scuttle about in the darkness.

It was a mighty uncomfortable feeling to be out in a crater hole and of a sudden hear the rattle and crash of tin cans.

More than once I have lain out there, night after night, my finger on the trigger and waiting, straining my eyes until they ached, for the sight of a Hun. It finally got on the nerves of both armies. The Huns withdrew first and a few days later we backed out, throwing up a trench a few yards behind the gap. They put up one in front.

This is the only case in history, I believe, where rats forced two armies to leave a strategic position.

The hill was on our right and on our left was our main trench line. Between the hill and our trench was the gap but linking us up was our little trench. We were so exposed and so close to the German lines that we never moved about in daytime and after darkness were very careful not to strike matches, or show any other lights.

One day there came the order from headquarters that we Canadians were to be moved on up to the Somme and in our stead came a battalion of Tommies.

Fights With Tommy

I remember one cocky young chap came into the trench and the first thing he did was to strike a match, preparatory to lighting a cigarette.

I knocked the match from his hand and snarled:

"Cut that stuff!"

"Gor blimey, wot th' bleedin' 'ell's th' matter with you Canydians?" he shouted.

I slapped him across the mouth.

He jumped up and I punched him in the jaw, knocking him down.

He got up again, but much of the fight was out of him. Still he put up his fists and we were just going at it again when a sergeant came along and wanted to know what was the matter.

I told him what the man had done and finished it up by saying:

"Not that I give a damn about him, but he can't light any matches while the Canadians are in this trench. If he wants to expose you fellows to the Huns it's all right with me. But I'm looking out for my own skin, and the hides of the fellows who are with me."

The sergeant reprimanded the Tommy.

From here to the Somme it was a 10 days' trip. On arriving at Albert about the end of August we immediately went into the front line trenches. This was the first time I had ever heard the sound of big guns, but I had become accustomed to the pounding of the smaller batteries and it did not bother me. I had often heard that you could see a big shell coming towards you, so time after time I watched. But I never succeeded in getting a glimpse of the destroyer. I could hear the rattle of them and the sound of the explosion, but never could see the actual outline.

We used to call them "freight cars." The first day I was in the trench there was nothing more than the usual firing. We went back, passing La Boisselle, near which Harry Lauder's son is buried, and into the chalk pits, to be held in reserve, for we were to be the second wave in the attack on Pozieres.

This was the first time I really went "over the top" and I presume the sensations I had were just like the sensations of other soldiers.

Alongside of us were the French-Canadians and I remember looking over at those fellows and wondering if they were having similar thoughts to mine. They formed a crack storming battalion and I felt deliriously happy to know that I was not faltering. I had often wondered how I would act once I was away from the protection of the sandbags, out in the open and headed straight for the enemy. I had often wondered if they would get me before I had a chance to raise my bayonet.

Bayonets First Hun

A soldier when he is charging across No Man's Land has as his main thought the desire to get to his destination. He always wants to meet the German man to man, and let the cold steel decide the argument.

Plunging a bayonet into a man is not the sensation some might imagine; the thing that "gets" every soldier is the pulling out of the weapon.

The first German I got with the steel was a big bearded fellow in this charge. As I went over the parapet I saw him. He looked like a mountain and I knew I was at a disadvantage, coming down on him. But I know I did not hesitate. I saw his eyes stare back into mine with just as ferocious a gaze as, I presume, was in my own. I saw him raise his gun to fire as I lunged forward.

The steel struck him fair. It ripped through him and with a quick jerk I yanked it out.

That sensation of a fraction of a second was a terrible one. I cannot describe it. The thought that you have killed doesn't matter. It's the idea of pulling out a bayonet, the peculiar drawing sensation that accompanies it, the spurting of the blood and the agonized stare of the beaten man that get you.

Were it not for the thought that one of the enemy will get you unless you act quickly, I doubt if the steel could be withdrawn.

It was a short and a furious fight when we went into that trench, and we held it for several days.

As in most cases, the German trenches are in bad shape when captured. They have been pounded by the British artillery and in spots the parapets have been completely knocked off. That's the way it was with this one. We were kept busy rebuilding them. It was while working here that I witnessed one of the things that, for the time being, made me madder than anything else.

One of our lads, a big six-footer, who was always happy, singing songs and cracking jokes, got his one night.

He was standing up in the trench and failed to notice that one of the protecting sandbags had been knocked off. Standing there, laughing and telling stories, he suddenly pitched over on his face.

A sniper, with the direct range, had got him through the throat.

I remember we were all as sore as could be. We hated to lose the big fellow. And we also were mad because his loss had deprived us of our battalion comedian.

After we were taken out of this trench we went back to the chalk pits for a rest.

Blown Up By Shell

It was while going into them that I had an experience that almost ruined my disposition.

Company A, to which I was attached, came out of the trenches first and behind it, about 50 yards, was Company B. A lieutenant and I were standing watching them and shaking hands with each other over the luck of getting out unscathed.

Just at the exact moment when he said: "It looks like I'm having about as much luck as you, Kingsley," a shell hit behind us, exploded, and threw both of us up into the air. When I came down, my face made a hole in the mud, while the lieutenant landed a dozen feet away. I recovered first, but was so scared that my throat was all tightend up.

With an effort, I blurted out:

"How—are—you?"

"All—right," he responded, "how—are—you?"

Then we laughed, got up, and shook hands all over again.

We got away from this point without losing any time and back in the billet we were met with cheers. We were covered, from head to foot, with muck, and while he went into an officers' barracks to change clothes, I stood outside and scraped off the mud as best I could.

I was just finishing when an orderly came running up and told me I was wanted over at headquarters.

I went, wondering what it was all about, and when I got in the lieutenant was in the midst of a bunch of friends.

"There's Kingsley now," he cried, as I came through the door. He recited the story over again, and then asked me if he hadn't told the truth.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

Everyone laughed hilariously, although I couldn't see any joke about it, and they dismissed me after saying that inasmuch as I substantiated the lieutenant's statements, the story must be true.

That was one of the jokes of the battalion for several days. For the life of me I have never been able to see through it.

I don't think anyone else did, but they figured it so much out of the ordinary that it had no proper classification and it was labeled a joke, and was laughed at accordingly.

Y. M. C. A. (or the Soldiers' Home)

When we are going to the front line trenches to make an attack, the Y. M. C. A. are also informed. They go forward as near to the point of attack as they dare. Usually just about a mile from the front line trench they build a sort of store out of sandbags. The walls and roof are in the neighborhood of three feet thick, and the inside space is about sixteen feet square.

The attack is made at dawn. Now when the attacking party goes "up the line," they take with them 48 hours' rations and three pints of water. The rations are "bully beef," as the canned corn beef is called, and shrapnel biscuits, as the hardtack is called. When the attack is over they consolidate the trench occupied, and must remain there at least 48 hours, until they are relieved by other troops. It happens sometimes that they cannot be relieved at the end of 48 hours, and as all relief work takes place at night, it means another 24 hours for the attacking party before the next possible relief. They may or may not get rations and water to carry on the next 24 hours. If the German artillery fire is so heavy that no one could get through it alive, they would be without rations. They suffer more from lack of water than anything, because the bursting shells give off a black smoke. Then there is the dust created by the shell in making the shell hole. Add to this the fact that the "bully beef" is a little salty (for it is impossible to take fresh meat), and you will realize that the men will become terribly thirsty, their tongues and throats parched.

But at last they are relieved, and march back to the rest billets. On the way they pass the Y. M. C. A. but that I spoke of previously. Every man as he passes will be given a hot drink of tea or coffee, whichever he prefers, and a cigarette.

The Longing for Tobacco

You may wonder why they give him the latter. I'll tell you. In going "over the top" you fall into shell holes, get soaked with water and caked with mud, and when you get into the trench there is water there, too. You are mud and blood from head to foot; in fact, you have everything on you that there is in

France to get. Now, after you have consolidated the trench the first thing you want to do is to smoke; it helps relieve the tension of the shell fire and the time of waiting for the German counter attack, which is sure to follow. If you are wet through, your cigarettes and tobacco are wet, too, and therefore useless.

Cigarette smokers will smoke upward of forty a day when under tension. Imagine being without a cigarette, just when it is most needed! I can assure you the craving is terrible. I have seen men go into a dug-out (if there happened to be one around) and scrape up ashes, cigar and cigarette stubs and chew them, to relieve the tension. So the Y. M. C. A. gives them a cigarette with their coffee. Can you imagine what that means to a man over there?

Then away he goes to the "rest billets." The "billets" are usually about five miles back from the front line trenches. We are given 48 hours to get there and report for the roll call. During spare time we sleep and get cleaned up.

After roll call, we are given 24 hours completely to ourselves, and the first thing the boys do is to beat it over to the Y. M. C. A. hut to write home. They feel so tickled to think they have once again got back without a scratch that they want to tell the whole world. They are just as anxious to write to you as you are to hear from them. As they cannot carry writing materials with them the Y. M. C. A. supplies them.

I can assure you that you will never receive a letter from a man at the front that is not written on the paper with the little red triangle in the corner. There are a great many other things that one could say of the splendid organization, but these are the outstanding features to the man "out there."

The Red Cross

What could an army do without the Red Cross? What would happen to the sick, the wounded? That thousands would die unnecessarily goes without saying. I think that probably the greatest tribute that can be paid to the Red Cross is the confidence of the wounded man. He feels that no matter how badly wounded he may be, if once he gets to the Red Cross man, his life is safe.

I think they are wonderful "out there." On the battlefields their work goes on day and night incessantly, and as methodically as the progress of the battle will allow them. Invariably they and the motor ambulances are in plain sight of the enemy. It is not always possible to keep out of sight, but they take the chances willingly. Hundreds of them are wounded and many of them have been killed, too. Their devotion to duty under shell fire is one of the outstanding features of the war.

I witnessed an incident during the Battle of the Somme which I shall never forget. A Red Cross officer and four stretcher bearers came to the support trenches in which I happened to be stationed the day after the attack had been made. Some wounded men were lying between the supports and front line trenches. The battalion stretcher bearers had done all that they could for them, and the Red Cross men came to take them back to the field hospital.

When a man is wounded he calls for the stretcher bearer. Those of you that have never heard that cry of "Stretcher bearer" cannot realize what it means. We cannot help the man and we know it, but the call is so heartrending that it is hard to resist going to the man's assistance, though we dare not go.

The officer in charge of the party that came up to our trench this day got out on top, holding a white flag with a Red Cross on it at arm's length, so that Fritz could plainly see it. They crossed over to some wounded men, dressed their wounds, then began to get ready for the return trip to the Ambulance Depot. One man was put on the stretcher and the party started off, the officer a little to one side and slightly in the lead, with his flag still in plain sight. Suddenly

down he went, with two bullets through the shoulder, but he got up and led the way once more. A moment later he went down again, and this time he did not get up. Almost at the same moment we heard the report of the whiz-bang (the German three inch shell). A salvo of these was sent over, the stretcher bearers were all wounded, and the man on the stretcher more badly wounded. Yet, in spite of this, another Red Cross party that same day went out and brought in several wounded men that were lying "out there."

Need one say anything more for them? I think not.

In "Jumping-Off" Trench

After a few days we were set to digging a "jumping-off trench" out in No Man's Land.

Here is an occupation, in case you are troubled with ennui, that will cure you.

A working party is assigned to dig a "jumping-off trench," and first you have to go out in No Man's Land and reconnoiter to see that there aren't any German working parties out, too.

We always choose a dark night—the darker the better—and the trench is dug about 50 yards out in front of our first line. The object of it is to get the attacking party out beyond the German barrage. When the Huns retreat they know the exact range of their own lines, just as we do, and any time an attack starts they can spray us with bullets and shells. That is, they could unless these "jumping-off" trenches were built.

We worked furiously and were tearing along at a great speed when one of our soldiers came racing down and in a hoarse whisper cried:

"The Germans are near the other end!"

We all dropped our spades and pickaxes, grabbed up our rifles and started along towards the point of danger.

After traveling a short distance we were told to halt and the officer in charge asked me to go with him.

We crawled along on all fours, moving cautiously, and after a time came to the point where we could hear the guttural voices of our enemies.

The lieutenant sounded a warning hiss and we dropped flat on our stomachs.

The voices were coming from a few feet away and for a minute or two we thought the Germans were coming down where our men had been digging.

We held our breath and I could feel the lieutenant's heels digging into my shoulder. I was afraid to move for fear of making a noise and I guess he didn't realize what he was doing.

Finally we located the sounds. The Germans were in their own trench a few feet away.

Our working party, instead of keeping on in a straight line, had curved until, in a few more feet, it would have burst right into where the Huns were watching.

I don't know how it was that they didn't hear our men working. They must have been in their dugouts or away from that portion of the line for a few minutes.

We abandoned that part of our "jumping-off" work.

For this night's work I was made a full corporal and my sergeantcy came soon afterwards.

Attacking a Machine Gun

The next day we went over and took the first line of German trenches and a portion of a communication trench. But we could go no further. Just around a traverse in the supporting trench the Germans had planted a machine gun, protecting it with sandbags and waiting for us to start through. We could see the hole in the bags where the nose of the gun was sticking out but we could not see the gun.

We made plans for attacking the spot in the morning and there were 40 bombers who were to lead the way. I was in charge of the supports. It was my duty to race along the trench and hurry up the supplies.

In some way, through a spy, no doubt, the Germans learned of the exact moment when we planned the attack. They were waiting for us.

Our bombers had gathered in the communicating trench—just around the corner out of sight of the Germans. At a given signal they dashed forward and the minute they did so they were met with a hail of bullets. The brave fellows went down, dropping like flies; the trench was filled with dead and dying. Those behind, not knowing the exact condition of things, kept pressing forward and it would only have been a question of time when we would have been completely wiped out, for the Germans had plenty of bullets. They were fighting us—and we didn't have a chance.

That's what made us crazy in our rage.

I presume had the fellows figured the situation as it came there would not have been so many casualties, but the thought that someone had betrayed the time of our attack and that we were being killed off without being given the sporting chance for our lives drove everyone forward.

Back where I was rushing the bombs from the supply depots the air was filled with the roar of guns.

I was hurrying along on one side of the trench and urging everyone to work with all possible speed when I noticed that, for a stretch of several feet, one side of our protecting parapet had been knocked down.

A soldier was carrying bombs, whistling as he came, and sensing the danger point I yelled "Duck!"

But he didn't hear me or it was too late, for an instant later a bullet smashed through the top of his head.

He went down in a heap.

Pulls Out Dead Soldier

Behind him were a score of others carrying bombs. They couldn't go around the dead man, for the trench was too narrow, and they couldn't crouch far enough to insure safety.

Our fellows up in front were yelling for supplies and for half a minute I didn't know what to do.

Then it came to me—like a flash.

Throwing myself on my face I ordered the soldier behind me to grab my feet while I managed to get hold of the dead man's hands and aided by the others I succeeded in pulling the lifeless obstacle away from the shallow place.

While this was going on a young chap named Watkins, perceiving that the bombers would never be able to get to the gun by rushing along the communication trench, yelled for volunteers, and jumping over the side, they made a rush across No Man's Land and to the spot where the Germans were criss-crossing us with their fire.

The Canadians were much outnumbered but their bombs were good and they silenced the enemy without the loss of a man. Swinging around they got in behind the machine gun just as some others spun around from the other side.

The crew of the gun was cut to pieces. The gun was captured. The communication trench was ours.

Working like madmen we forced our way on up it, turned the gun around and established it within a few feet of the first German line.

For that night's work I was made a sergeant.

Attack at Daybreak!

From there we went into the attack on the trenches near Bapaume. Here it was that I received the injuries that resulted in my discharge from active service.

The British army always attacks at daybreak.

The reason for this is fairly obvious, but I will explain:

At daybreak everything can be arranged for exactness. The officers' watches are synchronized and the exact moment of attack is given beforehand. Just a moment before the coming of dawn the command is given and the men fix bayonets and get ready.

The big guns, which have been pounding at a terrific rate for seven or eight minutes, dropping their shells a yard apart, and to the front of us, lift their barrage; the officers, knowing its exact location, move forward with it. The thing is timed nicely. It brings us up and ready to go over the enemy trenches just as dawn is breaking across the eastern sky. We can distinguish forms, but out in the darkness of night the defenders cannot distinguish us.

That is the advantage of the attacking party.

As our barrage lifts we follow, storming and attacking as we go.

The night before I had been out in No Man's Land on patrol and we had reported that the enemy's barbed wire was in good shape.

To the right of us were the Thirteenth Canadians—the Kilties—and on our left were the Forty-third, who were also Kilties.

Standing out there, waiting for the command of the captain, I, strange as it may sound, had no other thought than the one of whether my hunch would hold good. I had a counter-hunch that I was going to get nicked.

That didn't bother me. It only irritated me to think that I couldn't rid my mind of it. I would try to think of the task immediately in front, but would at once return to the thing I was trying the most to eliminate.

It is not a pleasant thought, I can assure you, to figure that the time is not long when you are going to get yours—or, in other words, be killed, you know not how.

There was no desire to run. I did not even think of that. It was just a curious sensation, standing with my bayonet fixed, and wondering if, after five months of hard fighting, I was going the way I had seen dozens of my pals and acquaintances go out.

Finally, as I shrugged my shoulders, I said:

"Sergeant," I remember thinking of my official title, my stripes, and I want you to know that there was no spirit of braggadocio—just that fatalistic ideal I had become imbued with. "Sergeant," I repeated, "if you are going west, you aren't going to go without making a fight of it."

Then came the captain's command. We moved forward. The protecting barrage lifted. We dropped into a slow trot and it wasn't long before we reached the barbed wire.

Tangled in Barbed Wire

I saw where the protecting device was torn and I plunged through the aperture. But my feet became entangled. Then, in struggling, my clothes caught on. I saw others caught in the wire and we fought quietly, but desperately, to get out. We feared, every minute, that the Germans would see us and would open fire and we knew that only one of two things could happen:

If we got out, we could carry on; if we stayed in, we would be killed.

After much ripping of uniforms and flesh, wounds we didn't feel at the time, we extricated ourselves, and I remember that 26 of us rushed for the German trench.

There was a captain in charge, and two lieutenants. Then myself.

In the first attack on the trench the captain was mortally wounded and the two lieutenants were knocked over. I was left in charge of the men.

We were outnumbered six to one, but we fought for everything that was in us. We had a big supply of bombs and we drove the Germans out, capturing a stretch of earthworks a hundred yards long.

To our left we could hear heavy fighting and running on we saw that the Germans were winning. There were several hundred of them all in a bunch and they were killing and capturing every Canadian who came over. We started throwing bombs and we soon had those Huns on the defensive.

We saw them scramble out of and behind their lines. There were probably 150 of them and they were getting ready to rush us. By this time there were only an even dozen left of the men who had come over with me. The Germans were sniping us off and just as I was getting ready to heave a bomb I saw a helmet poking around a curve in the trench.

Shot By German

I grabbed my gun, but it was too late.

A revolver spat viciously. I felt a stinging sensation in my left leg, near the hip, and I knew I had been shot.

The helmet disappeared. One of my men had got the German.

I straightened up and was bringing my gun around again when I saw a bomb flying towards me.

Throwing up my left arm—I was too weak to move, for my leg was paining terribly—I got the missile full on the wrist. It exploded, rendering my arm useless, but it did not knock me unconscious.

Just at this moment a big Kiltie came from another direction, and calling him I asked if he could throw a bomb.

"No' vera weel," he answered, with a grin.

"You can't learn any younger," I replied.

I saw the Germans were preparing to rush us and one of them, even at that moment, was coming.

We had to stop them.

The Mills bomb, which is used by the Canadians, is so timed as to explode four and one-half seconds after leaving the hand.

I drew the pin, first ordering the Highlander to hold until I had counted two. This, I figured, would give the bomb the correct time to explode right in the midst of the enemy.

The kilted soldier watched me with a curious, and, I thought at the time, an exceedingly calm eye, as I extracted the pin and then counted—ONE—TWO.

He threw directly at the German, who was now rushing toward us.

The bomb struck the ground in front of the Hun and I distinctly remember seeing the upper half of his body go flying into the air. I laughed and yelled:

"Fine shot, Scottie!"

The Highlander disappeared after that. I never found out what happened to him, but I suppose he was killed.

I managed to scramble around to see how things were coming and I found but four men uninjured.

"You better get out of here, sergeant!" exclaimed one.

"I guess you're right," I replied.

I scrambled over the top, and making my way back through the barbed wire, I struggled through the barrage that the Germans had put up to prevent any of our men returning to their own trenches.

Hit Four Times

I was hit in the right arm and in the right leg. As I rolled over the parapets to our own trenches I felt another shock in my back and I knew another bullet had nicked me.

"How's everything up in front?" asked a lieutenant.

"We're giving them hell," I blurted out, not wishing to admit that the boys I went with were getting licked.

"How are you feeling?"

"Pretty sick," I told him, and kept on.

I staggered out of our trench down into Death Valley. It was a relief when I got this far, for I felt that I was out of the fight, temporarily, at least, and on my way to the dressing station I knew was somewhere below.

Staggering and stumbling, pitching forward on my face and rolling over and over I covered Death Valley.

I was nearing Courcellette when I saw about 50 feet in front a Tommy who had been wounded in the arm.

"Wait a minute, Sarge," he yelled back, "h'and h'I'll 'elp you."

He turned, but a sniper, stationed in a German trench near Le Sars, a half mile away, got him.

I was pretty far gone, but I managed to roll over until I got to where the Tommy was stretched. I felt for his heart. It wasn't beating. There was a bloody wound in the side of his head.

I lay beside him for quite a while and I guess I lost consciousness for a few minutes. When I came to I managed to scramble up on all fours and after a struggle succeeded in getting over the dead man.

Past this point and for a distance of two or three hundred yards I staggered on to a dressing station in a dug-out in what we knew as the Sugar Refinery trench.

Here my wounds were dressed, iodine first being sopped into them, and as I stumbled up the steps an old chaplain came over and helped me.

"Do you think you can go on?" he asked.

"I'm going to try," I told him.

"That's right, my man," he said. "You'll get better treatment at the Ambulance Depot if you can make the grade."

Then he told me how sorry he was that he could not help me along. But there were so many poor chaps who were being brought in every minute that he had to stay and minister to them.

I was sorry he couldn't go along, too, for I thought I needed his help.

Chaplain Is Wounded

But I left and he was standing on the steps watching me go. I had covered a distance of nearly 200 feet when a shell hit the dug-out, wrecking it and killing half the occupants. The poor old chaplain was badly cut up.

From here to the Ambulance Station it was nearly a mile. I kept plugging away, a few steps at a time, and when I came within sight of the place I collapsed completely. But a Red Cross man who had been watching me saw me fall and he rushed out, bringing along four stretcher bearers, who loaded me into the canvas and carried me to the temporary hospital.

My wounds had been torn open and had filled with dirt, but I did not care. I was among friends and I knew they would help me all they could.

Fresh bandages were wrapped about me, after the wounds had been dressed and I had been inoculated so as to be free from the tetanus germ, and I was laid out with a score of others to wait the ambulances. Two came and the first was filled before my turn came. It wheeled around and made down the road while I was hoisted into the second.

The first ambulance had not gone half a mile when a shrapnel shell hit it and the driver was sorely wounded. The other man on the seat was banged up and the injured men inside badly shaken up.

We hurried past. Those are orders. Others hastened out to assist.

I don't remember much after that. I know I came to a full realization of what had happened when I woke up in a base hospital in the south of England several days afterwards.

I was in this hospital, as well as a hospital in Canada, for nine months before being discharged.

I will never, I am afraid, regain the full use of my left arm.

But I figure I am lucky. I figure that my "hunch" was a good one, and that the time I spent fighting for the cause was worth everything else in life.



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